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The Duality of Billy's Spirit, The Hope for Humanity in
Cormac Mccarthy's Border Trilogy

Jessica Y. Spearman

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“FOR HE CONTAINED WITHIN HIM A LARGENESS OF SPIRIT:” THE DUALITY OF
BILLY’S SPIRIT, THE HOPE FOR HUMANITY IN CORMAC MCCARTHY’S BORDER
TRILOGY

by

JESSICA Y. SPEARMAN

(Under the Direction of Olivia Carr Edenfield)

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the contradictory merging of the differentiating forces that drive the natural world and the people in McCarthy’s Border Trilogy, with the most prominent being Billy’s persistent naïve view of the world as he grows from a boy to a man on his journey. The Border Trilogy chronicles the coming of age journey of John Grady Cole and Billy Parham. The second installment, *The Crossing*, focuses on the various dichotomies that construct the natural world—all of which are mirrored in Billy’s relationships with the mystical she-wolf, his brother, Boyd, the various people that he meets on his journey, and the land itself. I highlight how McCarthy creates Billy’s journey by weaving several smaller dichotomies throughout the text that serve as metaphors which, in turn, represent the bigger dichotomy of life and death found within the natural world. Billy’s connection with the natural world creates his “largeness of spirit,” which is recognized by the many who gravitate to Billy during his life. Given McCarthy’s tendency to place his characters in such a dire world, Billy’s persistent naivety in juxtaposition to all his experiences causes his spirit and his journey to serve as a message of hope for the world, humanity, and the precious treasures that can be found beneath all the heartache.

INDEX WORDS: Dichotomy, Cormac McCarthy, She-wolf, Hope, Spirit, *The Crossing*, *Cities of the Plains*, Journey

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B.S., Georgia Southern University, 2012

M.A., Georgia Southern University 2014

A Master of Arts Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS ENGLISH

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

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Electronic Version Approved: Spring
2014

DEDICATION

To My Jazlyn, my angel,

Thank you for being my *fire* and inspiring me to be more than I ever thought I would be. You will forever be Mommy's reason for living. To borrow from McCarthy: "You are my warrant. *If [you are] not the word of God God never spoke.*"

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the following people who have both inspired and tirelessly supported me in my educational endeavors.

First and foremost, to Victor, thank you for being a wonderful father to our daughter, for believing in me no matter what, and for just being there without hovering.

To my mother, Cathie, who inspired my love of reading, (even if it did begin with Harlequin Romance novels), whose endless financial support made my education possible—I thank you.

To Ms. Teenie, thank you for being my best friend and for cheering me on these past 8 years, you are my intellectual soul-mate.

To Dr. Alan Brasher, for inspiring my love for literature in a way that I never knew possible; I will forever be in awe of your mind.

To the Georgia Southern Writing and Linguistics Department, for the chance to teach young minds while continuing to improve mine.

To the Georgia Southern Literature and Philosophy Department, for giving me some of the best years of my life and teaching me all that I know and love about Literature and Philosophy.

To Dr. Caren Town, thanks for all you've done for me these past many years and for being one of the nicest, most understanding people I have ever met.

To Dr. Bradley Edwards, thanks for agreeing to read my meager thoughts on McCarthy and offering up your most valuable insight.

And last but certainly not least, to Dr. Olivia Edenfield, thank you for teaching me to see the beauty and the hope buried in McCarthy's world; you are a remarkable teacher and an even more remarkable woman.

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INTRODUCTION

Cormac McCarthy's novels, more often than not, are read as bleak nihilistic godless tales full of violence and degradation. However, he broke away from his typical thematic style of violence and darkness with the publication of *All the Pretty Horses* (1992), the first installment of his Border Trilogy. Malcolm Jones Jr. notes that McCarthy's "fans are divided into two camps. The first and much smaller group [who] fell for McCarthy years ago, when he was writing Southern Gothic novels distinguished by creepy plots full of necrophilia and incest, told in prose so rich it could rot your teeth. The second set of customers came along with the publication in 1992 of *All the Pretty Horses*," which Jones views as a departure from his original Gothic style (54). According to Jones, McCarthy's original tactics return in full force with *The Crossing* (1995), the second installment in his Border Trilogy: "McCarthy's longtime fans will feel more at home in *The Crossing* [as] McCarthy once again cleaves to his vision of the world as a place where evil is as common as dirt while goodness is only an ideal, something to be sought after" (54). Anthony Quinn, like Jones, draws a distinct line between *The Crossing* and its predecessor, *All the Pretty Horses*: "...anyone hoping for a further installment of John Grady's dusty peregrinations will be disappointed by [*The Crossing*]... it saddles up a new hero, 16 year old Billy Parham, who will also undergo a traumatic passage from innocence to experience" (2). Quinn completes his review of the text with the notion that "one is left to conclude that the author regards the human experience as a hopeless battle against the impersonal, unforgiving operations of fate" (2). According to Sven Birkerts, "the theme, moreover, is one familiar from previous books: McCarthy maps again the brutal terms of existence and argues the unceasing need to be stoical and resourceful in the face of pain and certain loss" (38). While their

assessments are perceptive, violent dark tales are not the only thing McCarthy offers in his second installment of the trilogy. There is an underlying current of hope that follows the protagonist throughout his next two installments.

Many critics are just as concerned with McCarthy's style as they are his subject matter; Birkerts goes on to point out that "to talk about McCarthy is to talk about style every bit as much as subject matter. His novels, for better or worse, are not occupied with the intricacies of plot. Things do happen, of course, important things, but so often it seems as if they happen because the writer has willed it so...McCarthy mediates on creation, stares at it" (38). According to Jean Richey, "[McCarthy] uses this great talent to try to come to terms with the omnipresence of evil in man's nature, as he understands and presents it" (140). Although and as much as she may view his talent to be great, Richey does point out what she views as a flaw in his style: "often verbose and contrived commentaries substitute for action, dialogue, and reader response" in the third part of *The Crossing* (140). Consequently, many critics support Richey's view of McCarthy's verbose ponderings in *The Crossing*. Brooke Allen dubs McCarthy's text inaccessible, asserting: "I believe that an inaccessible novel is a flawed novel, and that this is richly illustrated by the trilogy's second volume, *The Crossing*" (24). Yet, this assessment is a flawed one in itself; while she may not be able to "access" McCarthy's text, this does not mean that it is completely inaccessible; perhaps she has not approached the text from the right direction. Allen continues her review with an assertion not unlike those of Jones and Quinn; she sets *All the Pretty Horses* and *The Crossing* in stark contrast to one another: "In *All the Pretty Horses*, McCarthy achieved artistic balance through the use of a fine rhetorical understatement that reflected the land and the people living there" (24). Allen views *The Crossing* vastly differently, stating that "McCarthy gave in to the temptation to editorialize. He adulterated the

purity of the narrative with the long passages that allow some wise or fey figure to wax philosophical or poetic at excruciating length” (24). Sara Mosle supports Allen’s assessment of McCarthy’s style, but she brings the focus back to his subject matter with her claim that “by continuing to write in the grand style, McCarthy sometimes gives the violence in his books a grandeur it doesn’t deserve” (289). Viewing his text in this way is problematic, to say the least, it is not McCarthy that gives violence an elevated place in his novels; it is the critics and readers who fixate on the violence instead of the hope and goodness that McCarthy indubitably includes.

However, not all critics view his style as faulty; Walter Sullivan perfectly assess McCarthy’s writing stating that “these faults, which might prove fatal to the work of a less skillful writer, are diminished when they are set beside McCarthy’s virtues as a novelist” (292). Sullivan highlights McCarthy’s ability to write a story that leaps from the page into the reader’s mind: “To say that his detail is sharp and that his dialogue is accurate is feebly to understate the case. His words bring his created world intensely alive. His descriptions linger vividly in the reader’s mind; the voices of his characters echo there. His sequences of violent action are so fully realized that they are often painful to read” (292). He places McCarthy’s abilities squarely in line with Conrad: “In all that he does, he brings Joseph Conrad’s admonition that the writer should make the reader see and hear and smell and feel to a fruition that even that old master may not have envisioned” (292). Robert Hass also supports a positive view of McCarthy’s style claiming that *The Crossing* is McCarthy’s answer to “how [a] writer...follow[s] up on the immense critical and popular success of his novel *All the Pretty Horses*” (426). Hass continues his praise of McCarthy by positioning him in relation to other powerhouse American authors such as Hemingway, O’Connor, Faulkner, and Twain (426).

Though it is clear that many scholars are divided on McCarthy and his works, nobody

denies his ability to cause his readers to pause after reading his texts. According to Ashley Kunsu, “McCarthy asks the big questions in sober tones, yet he never presumes to offer final answers. Instead, he leads readers to the very edges of human isolation, suffering, and despair, and he forces audiences to decide for themselves (146). This is the genius of Cormac McCarthy; he is a master of forcing his audience to confront everything they believe they know about the world and accept it or refute it. Similar to Flannery O’Connor’s use of grotesque characters in much of her writings, McCarthy, too, offers his readers a glimpse of the ugly side of humanity. O’Conner stated that as a writer “when you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs you do, you can relax a little and use more normal ways of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock—to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost blind you draw large and startling figures” (978). His use of startling figures suggests that McCarthy is writing to an audience that may not share his beliefs, hence his need to bombard his readers with difficult and often horrific situations.

Steven Frye views *The Crossing* in “the same class of the American historical romance as exemplified by James Fenimore Cooper, Faulkner and Melville, and he sees Billy Parham as a mixed character type who blends varieties of the romance tradition, from the mythic romances of Scott to the psychological and metaphysical romances of Hawthorne and Poe” (Kunsu 148). This view of Billy is supported by McCarthy’s treatment of nature and how in the trilogy he positions Billy in relation to nature. As *The Crossing* chronicles the coming-of-age journey of Billy Parham, the text reveals the various dichotomies that come together to create the natural world, all of which are mirrored in Billy’s development as a man. The relationships that he forms with his brother, Boyd, the various people whom he meets on his journey, and most importantly nature itself as portrayed through the mystical wolves—all reflect the duality that Billy

internalizes through his strong connection with nature. McCarthy maps Billy's journey by weaving several smaller dichotomies throughout the text that serve as metaphors which, in turn, represent the bigger dichotomy of life and death found within the natural world. The metaphorical dichotomies continue to follow Billy into the final installment of the trilogy, *Cities of the Plain*, as he gains a surrogate brother in John Grady and eventually a mother in Betty.

Throughout the texts, there is a contradictory merging of the differentiating forces that drive the natural world and the people in it with the most prominent of these being Billy's persistent naïve view of the world as he grows from a boy to a man on his journey and as he continues to develop in *Cities of the Plain* into an intensely remarkable man. Given McCarthy's tendency to place his characters in such dire circumstances, Billy's persistent naivety and goodness in juxtaposition to all he experiences says much about the message in McCarthy's texts. Edwin T. Arnold compares Billy's journey to that of John Grady Cole's in the trilogy as "ultimately more devastating, spiritually, for he learns the greater truth of humanity's misplaced vanity and ultimate insignificance" (59). While Arnold's assessment is perceptive because of the excessive nihilist moments recognized in the world McCarthy creates for Billy, Arnold too recognizes the need to look beyond the challenging darkness to find faith. It is in Billy's "largeness of spirit," his unwavering naivety, and his overall survival in the face of such horrible occurrences in which the faith of the text is found and which causes Billy's journey to serve as a message of hope for the world, humanity, and the precious treasures that can be found beneath all the heartache.

SECTION 1: BILLY'S BEGINNING: THE CREATION OF A DUAL SPIRIT

The Crossing does not open with Billy's epic journey; it opens with Billy and Boyd riding through the "new" countryside, which offers a unique view of Billy's temperament. The first glimpse of the duality that permeates Billy's world comes as he rides coupled with his brother, telling Boyd not one, but two names for the various natural elements. Billy clearly cares deeply for his brother and exemplifies his role of elder brother as "he carried Boyd before him in the bow of the saddle and named to him features of the landscape and birds and animals in both spanish and english" (*Crossing* 3). The fact that Billy takes time to share both Spanish and English names with his brother highlights the duality of Billy's heritage—he is both Mexican and American, and as the use of Spanish is continued and multiplied throughout the novel, Billy himself emerges as a dichotomy between the two languages and the two countries.

Billy as a dichotomy is elaborated further with his first interaction with the wolves at a very young age, which solidifies the foundation for his relationship with the natural world. As a child, he slips from his bed in the middle of the night in order to catch a glimpse of the wolves that he heard in the hills near his home. As he crouches in the snow, watching and waiting, he describes the night as some mystical realm and the animals as "phantom" beings that inhabit the night. Though Billy develops a truly deep connection with the wolves, he recognizes the divide between his world and that of the wolves as to him "they seemed of another world entire" (*Crossing* 4). In this moment, Billy is both connected to his mystical wolves and separated from them at the same time. Even as he loses sight of the wolves, he patiently waits in the snow for their return: "Then he saw them coming. Loping and Twisting. Dancing. [...] Loping and running and rising by twos in a standing dance and running on again" (*Crossing* 4). McCarthy uses this instance to create a deeper connection between Billy and his wolves; after Billy sees the

wolves rising by twos, they spot Billy in the snow and both he and the wolves pause to absorb each other's presence: "They were looking at him. He did not breathe. They did not breathe. They stood. Then they turned and quietly trotted on" (*Crossing* 4-5). The wolves, like many of the people that Billy will meet on his life's journey, recognize the quality of Billy's spirit. Billy describes this moment as electric, as a moment of *knowing* on the wolves' part: "He could feel the presence of their knowing that was electric in the air" (*Crossing* 4). The fact that wild wolves merely stop to look at him says much about the type of person Billy is and will become. Generally speaking, the natural inclination of the wolves should be to protect themselves by attacking or to running from Billy. The moment they hold him in their gaze is the beginning of the solidification of his connection to nature, the beginning of the creation of his dual spirit. This connection with the wolves and nature grows stronger throughout his journey and becomes a key part of his coming of age and an integral part of who he is as a man.

Billy keeps his moment with the wolves to himself never sharing it with anyone else: "When he got back to the house Boyd was awake but he didn't tell him where he'd been nor what he'd seen. He never told anybody" (*Crossing* 5). Billy is so entirely shaped by this moment with the wolves that it becomes a source of comfort to him. He revisits the midnight interlude with the wolves in a dream during his search for Boyd:

He knelt in the snow and reached out his arms to them and they touched his with their wild muzzles and drew away again and their breath was warm and it smelled of the earth and the heart of the earth. When the last of them had come forward they stood in a crescent before him and their eyes were like footlights to the ordinate world and then they turned and wheeled away and loped off through the snow and vanished smoking in the winter night. (*Crossing* 295)

The fact that Billy turns to his connection with nature in a moment of despair shows what an integral part nature is to his spirit. In his anguish, his unconscious mind reached, not to the people of his life, but to his mystical wolves and to the “heart of the earth” they hail from.

Arnold refers to this dream as one of three essential moments that will mark the development of Billy: “*The Crossing* contains three major dream-like or visionary episodes that mark the development of its main character...Billy will experience the apocalyptic moment, will come to the place described by the old wolf trapper (and fellow outcast) Don Arnulfo as that where “acts of God and those of man are of a piece. Where they cannot be distinguished...” (60).

Ultimately, Billy does reach this point, where the actions of men are so heart-wrenchingly horrible that he seems to be fatedly plagued by death and loss.

Billy’s connection with nature and his naivety come to culmination when he is tasked with killing the she-wolf and ridding his father of a problem. With his persistently naïve view of the world, Billy decides to return the she-wolf to her home in Mexico. According to Wallis R. Sanborn, McCarthy’s treatment of the shewolf in the text is somewhat troubling and contradictory: “While McCarthy honors and promotes the mythos of the wolf in *The Crossing*, he also demonstrates man’s urge to control the natural world in a series of human-driven indignities the she-wolf is forced to undergo” (143). Sanborn’s assertion of McCarthy’s treatment of the wolf strongly supports the notion of Billy’s dual spirit and contradictory nature throughout his journey because it is Billy’s naivety or innocence that causes him to believe he can save the she-wolf. Sanborn notes that Billy honestly believes he is embarking on a noble mission, but he views Billy’s actions as “the actions that ultimately destroy the she-wolf” (145). Sanborn’s stance on Billy’s treatment of the she-wolf is very harsh. The key to understanding Billy’s actions is to remember that he is, in this moment, still a boy tasked with a man’s job.

Sanborn also fails to recognize what the wolves see in Billy and what many men will see in Billy. There is a nobility in Billy that causes many to respect his choices and his ability to complete his tasks. He always manages to hold on to his naivety, in a sense, becoming a man-child, which also helps to reinforce the notion of Billy as a dichotomy.

His journey with the she-wolf is what begins his epic journey back and forth across the border between America and Mexico, and her eventual death is the catalyst for his growth from boyhood to manhood, yet not completely. Billy claims ownership of the shewolf in a very unique way, stating that “the wolf had been entrusted into his care but that it was not his wolf and he could not sell it” (*Crossing* 90). There is a duality to his claim on the she-wolf; she is his to care for, but not his to control, and that is the crucial element of the relationship that he builds with her. Billy’s naïve nature is evident in his initial interactions with the shewolf when he finds her in the trap. He speaks to her as if she is a person, though she is not: “It aint no use to fight it, he told her, Get up, he said. You aint hurt” (*Crossing* 56-57). These are simple phrases spoken as if he were conversing with a brother or familiar friend; however, it is the shewolf he is speaking to, a wild animal intent on fleeing or injuring Billy if given the chance. When Billy finally makes it to the road with his quarry, he encounters an old man. He encourages Billy many times to abandon his quest, but he too, like the wolves, sense the quality of Billy’s spirit. Many times during their encounter, the old man watches Billy as if he sees something that is not readily noticeable: “[Billy] stopped and looked back. The old man was standing in the road watching them” (*Crossing* 62). His parting words to Billy is “I think that’s a good idea,” which is a direct contradiction to his earlier encouragement to end the quest. (*Crossing* 62). Clearly, the old man is confused by Billy and the she-wolf, yet he both aids Billy is catching his horse and allows Billy to continue down the road, which suggests that he respects Billy’s ability to handle himself

and the she-wolf.

The dichotomy that is created in this scene is further elaborated as the man approaches the shewolf, he notes that she is pregnant, which comes directly after he tells Billy that the wolf will “eat him alive” given the opportunity (*Crossing* 58). The shewolf, in this moment, is suggested to be more than a mere catalyst for Billy’s journey. She, too, embodies a dual spirit much like the one Billy will continue to develop on his journey. As the shewolf emerges as more than a mere wolf, Chris Powici uses the first scene with the wolf to examine what he calls McCarthy’s wolf. According to Powici’s reading, McCarthy’s wolf is a wolf *in* and *of* the world because “it has not emerged from some impenetrable recess, either of the primeval forest or the primeval mind. This is a wolf with a history, a wolf that is *in* and *of* the world, that very same world over which we cast an invisible net of lines” (5). While Powici’s reading of the wolf is notable, the text suggests that the role of the shewolf is much more than being an element *in* and *of* the world. Steven Frye notes that “the wolf is McCarthy’s icon for naturalism’s deterministic world.” Yet the fact that she is actively creating life while simultaneously taking life is representative, Frye posits, of nature itself, the very embodiment of life and death existing in the same plane (49). When the shewolf is first introduced to the reader, her condition is noted to be her first pregnancy and later “she pulled down the veal calf” and “ate till her belly dragged” (*Crossing* 25). In the shewolf, there is both nurturer and killer, just as there is in the natural world. The nature that she represents is the untainted nature that has been untouched by man. According to Robert Jarrett in his critical analysis of McCarthy’s texts, the shewolf is “the supreme representation of the Other...embodying an alternate consciousness to that of the human” (118). Using Jarrett’s assertion, it would be correct to assume that the relation of the shewolf is representative of the natural world. Billy, even as a boy, recognized separation of

man's world and the natural world of the wolf. When he crept out alone in the snow to view his mystical wolves he notes that "they seemed of another world entire" (*Crossing* 4).

Throughout the text, the notion that the natural world exists in a realm that the human mind cannot understand becomes more and more apparent. It is in the advice of the ailing wolf hunter, Don Arnulfo, that the first connection between the wolf and the natural world is mentioned: "El lobo es una cosa incognoscible, he said. Lo que se tiene en la trampa no es mas que dientes y forro. El lobo propio no se puede conocer. Lobo o lo que sabe el lobo. Tan como preguntar lo que saben las piedras. Los arboles. El mundo"¹ (*Crossing* 45). The hunter equates trying to understand the wolf with trying to understand the world and the natural elements that inhabit the world. He goes on to state "that the wolf is a being of great order and that it knows what men do not: that there is no order in the world save that which death has put there" (*Crossing* 45). Death creating order is not a concept that man generally recognizes; death is typically viewed as the sad ending of life. Man vainly views his persistent attempts of controlling nature and trying to bend it to his will as the only order that matters. However, death is the natural order of things in the she-wolf's world—the world that existed before man and the one that will exist long after he is gone. In many cases, life is created from the cycle that ultimately ends in death. Frye recognizes "the idea that 'there is no order in the world save that which death has put there' [as] an almost epigrammatic proclamation of philosophical naturalism, insofar as death itself is the agent of an order which does not emerge from any transcendent God" (50). Yet, therein lays the dichotomy of God and nature; from the evidence given in McCarthy's text, the order found in nature is found in the cycle of life and death regardless of whether man can understand it. Why can it not be said that death, as an agent of order, is an extension of God? The

¹ The wolf is an unknowable thing, that which one has in the trap is no more than teeth and fur. One cannot know the true wolf. Wolf or what the wolf knows. It's like asking what the stones know. The trees. The world.

problem lies not in whether or not death itself emerges from God; the problem falls in how death is perceived. Death is neither good nor bad; it is only a natural process of life.

As a result, the world and the shewolf both emerge as unknowables that man constantly tries to both contain and define, which the hunter further emphasizes when he compares the wolf to a snowflake. Just as the snowflake disappears in the hand once it has been caught, everything that makes the wolf what she is will disappear with her capture, and it is when the she-wolf is captured and forced to fight in the dogfights that Billy finally realizes the magnitude of trying to impose order on both the wolf and the natural world that she represents: “He squatted over the wolf and touched her fur. He touched the cold and perfect teeth. The eye turned to the fire gave no light and he closed it with his thumb and sat by her and put his hand upon her bloodied forehead and closed his own eyes that he could see her running in the mountains, running in the starlight where the grass was wet” (*Crossing* 127). Billy chooses to kill the shewolf rather than let her suffer at the hands of those who would use her as a vicious pawn, and though his choice in killing her was the right thing to do for her, nature itself appears angry as “a half moon hung cocked in the east over the mountains like an eye narrowed in anger” (*Crossing* 121). The implications of his choice suggest that the order imposed on the wolf would have forever changed her and that she is beyond repair just as McCarthy’s world will perhaps eventually become. Yet, Billy is, in a sense, imposing his own order on the chaos of the dog fights by choosing to kill the she-wolf rather than letting her suffer at the hands of the evil men who captured her.

Like Billy and the shewolf, Boyd, too, emerges as a dichotomy, yet his nature is in great contrast to Billy’s. Boyd possesses a particularly distrusting attitude when the brothers encounter the Indian in the river bed and in their interactions thereafter. After Billy agrees to feed the

Indian, it is Boyd who is the distrusting voice of opposition: “Everything you can do it dont mean it’s a good idea” (*Crossing* 9). When the brothers first encounter the Indian in the river bed, Boyd’s dichotomy is revealed. As he encounters the indian, one of the first things he notices is the Indian’s eyes, particularly his image reflected in those eyes: “He stood twinned in those dark wells with hair so pale, so thin and strange, the selfsame child” (*Crossing* 6). Boyd sees two images of himself in the eyes of the Indian, and this twinned image of Boyd persists throughout the novel. Throughout the text, Boyd is the younger brother whom Billy always tries to protect and shelter, yet, as the text suggests, there is a more visceral side to Boyd. Nell Sullivan views Boyd’s role as a “stereotypical [role] chivalric male and oedipal son,” as it was this initial meeting with the Indian that lead to the deaths of their parents (234). Boyd’s compliance with Billy’s wishes even though he knows that they should not aid the Indian shows the depth of Billy and Boyd’s bond. Both his distrust of the Indian and his eventually becoming the “guero” with the pistol highlight the marked differences between Boyd and Billy. When Boyd becomes the hero of the corridero², “Pelo tan rubio. Pistola en mano. Que buscas joven”³ is reminiscent of the twinned images reflected in the Indian’s eyes (*Crossing* 375). Though he is the younger of the two, Boyd has an independent quality that Billy never manages to change; in a sense, Boyd is a child-man. The apposition of Boyd’s untrusting visceral view of the world with Billy’s naïve innocence shows the contradictory nature of both the brothers and people in general.

In addition to his relationship with his brother and the shewolf, Billy meets many people during his journey. Both his time spent with strangers and the journey itself represent the beginning of Billy’s transition—the transition between boyhood and adulthood and living with

² Singer/story-teller

³ Hair so blond. Pistol in hand. What are you looking for, young one?

family and being on his own. Three of the most important people whom Billy meets on his journey are the old Indian man from the mountains, the church caretaker, and the blind man. Frye also recognizes the persistent goodness in Billy and the importance of the stories for Billy while traveling, stating that “Billy’s life is marred by failure and weakness. And yet a firm ethical foundation underlies his actions and human relationships, and the primary focus of the novel is the manner in which individuals derive meaning through narrative” (57). The advice and guidance that Billy receives through the use of narrative does indeed play an integral part in aiding Billy on his journey and developing his spirit, which most all the people he meets do in stories, and it is clearly with these strangers’ stories that Billy is further shaped by his epic journey.

The many people whom Billy meets on his journey are drawn to him in an unusual way; each of them displays a desire to nurture and care for Billy. He first encounters the old Indian man during his seclusion in the mountains after the death of the shewolf. As he is readying to take his leave, a man approaches him with some parting words “speaking with great earnestness in the boy’s eyes and holding his saddle fore and aft so that the boy sat almost in his arms” (*Crossing* 133). The man places his hands around Billy, one on the back of the saddle and one on the front as if to cradle Billy like a child. In this instance, the man is the dual figure of both stranger and father which, in a sense, mirrors what his relationship with his father has now become in his absence from his home and family. His state of familial flux is further emphasized in the information the old man shares with Billy. He repeatedly refers to Billy as “huerfano”⁴ even after Billy tells the man that he indeed has a family, but the old man is persistent with his advice for Billy to “cease his wanderings and make for himself some place in the world because

⁴ orphan

to wander in this way would become for him a passion and by this passion he would become estranged from men and so ultimately from himself” (*Crossing* 134). The old man’s advice is both a forewarning and a foreshadowing for things to come. Billy does not yet know that his parents have actually been murdered and that he is on the precipice of being totally alone in the world, save for his brother. The old man ends his advice with a remark on Billy’s spirit and the implications for Billy in not sharing his nature with the world:

He said that the world could only be known as it existed in men’s hearts. For while it seemed a place which contained men it was in reality a place contained within them and therefore to know it one must look there and come to know those hearts and to do this one must live with men and not simply pass among them. He said that while the huerfano might feel that he no longer belonged among men he must set this feeling aside for he contained within him a largeness of spirit which men could see and men would wish to know him even as he needed the world for they were one (*Crossing* 134).

The old man’s advice comes right after Billy has removed himself from all that he has known. The death of the shewolf causes Billy to pause, which is witnessed in his chosen seclusion. According to Frye, “in one sense, Billy ignores the old man’s advice, as he continues his wandering even into old age. But in *Cities of the Plain* he seeks that home in his relationship with John Grady Cole” (58). His assertion is somewhat correct, but it is John Grady’s death like that of the shewolf that push Billy into seclusion. Billy’s wandering is not because he wants to ignore the old man’s advice; it is because of his inability to deal with the loss of two such important beings in his life. Billy’s moments of seclusion are reminiscent of McCarthy’s later text, *The Road*.

The father in *The Road* has placed his son and himself in a chosen seclusion by not

trusting anyone they find on the road, yet the father always tells the boy that they are the good guys who carry the fire. While the fire is never truly defined in the text, it is suggested to be goodness, or, as the old man tells Billy, “a largeness of spirit.” Thomas H. Schaub supports this view of the “fire.” He states that “the discourse of fire provides another source of the novel’s indirection working powerfully upon the reader; as part of the father’s caretaking, he tries to pass his values on to his son, in part through the language of ‘fire’ he uses to justify their lives and to motivate the boy” (160). Throughout the text, the boy himself is concerned with death, but the father reassures him that “nothing bad is going to happen,” to which the boy answers, “Because we’re carrying the fire” (*The Road* 83). Schaub notes that “the image of ‘fire’ is less abstract than the word ‘light’ and may convey the concept of spirit in a way the boy can grasp, but in the context of the still burning holocaust of the world it represents at least the sacred fire of human spirit, in opposition to the demonic fires of the apocalypse”(160). When the old man tells Billy that “men could see [the spirit] and that men would wish to know him and that the world would need him even as he needed the world for they are one,” he sounds very much like the boy in *The Road*, who constantly urges his father to help people along the road and his constant yearning to have the companionship of other children. (*Crossing* 134). It seems that perhaps the boy in *The Road* is the only one who knows the truth of the old man’s words to Billy—that companionship is necessary to live a complete life.

The old man ends with a warning to Billy of the danger that comes with his large spirit: “while this itself was a good thing like all good things it was a danger” (*Crossing* 134). However positive the old man’s advice seems for Billy, the last piece of advice is in pivotal contrast to the words with which he began his advice and sounds very much in support of the father’s actions in *The Road*. The father can see the goodness in his son and forsakes interaction with other people

in order to protect him. The old man in this scene and the suggested connection to McCarthy's later text show how crucial contradictory merging of the differentiating ideas are to McCarthy's storytelling. They lay the foundation for the many dichotomies that create his hopeful characters, environment, and spirituality. McCarthy will revisit this theme in the last installment of the trilogy, *Cities of the Plain*, when Billy finally finds the family he lost.

McCarthy's message of hope for the future of the world and for Billy is surprisingly found in the story that the blind man and his wife share with Billy. The man's story is about his journey from being a sighted person to now being blind. His story is filled with horror and despair, but he does have hope. He tells Billy of how he was blinded and that the evil man who wounded him still lives, that evil such as this will always live. According to the blind man, he never saw the world until he was blind: "En este viaja el mundo visible es no mas que un distraimiento. Pare los ciegos y para todos los hombres. Ultimamente sabernos que no podemos ver el buen Dios. Vamos escuchando. Me entiendes, joven? Debemos escuchar"⁵(*Crossing* 292). The blind man himself merges as a dichotomy—someone who could not see the world until he is blinded. He had to learn to listen to the world in order finally to see the blessing of God. In a sense, he was blind to the good in the world before he was maimed, perhaps blinded by all the violence and heartache he had experienced. He also shares with Billy his assertion that the picture of the world that men see is all they know due to their not having the ability to look past the order which they try to impose: "He will not know that while the order which the righteous seek is never righteousness itself but only order, the disorder of evil is in fact the thing itself" (*Crossing* 293). The order that the blind man speaks of is the control that man seeks to impose on the natural world, which is constantly shown to end in error and comes to culmination in

⁵ On this voyage the visible world is no more than a distraction. For those that are blind and for all men. Finally we know that we can't see the good God. We go listening. Do you understand me young one? We should listen.

McCarthy's *The Road*. The blind man ends his story with what he sees as "the greatest blessing from God." According to the blind man's story, life is fleeting; good or evil, nothing that can be touched lasts forever and that in itself is the blessing of the natural world:

Somos dolientes en la oscuridad. Todos nosotros. Me entiendes? Los que pueden ver, los que no pueden... Lo que debemos entender, said the blind man, es que ultimamente todo es polvo. Todo lo que podemos tocar. Todo lo que podemos ver. En esto tenemos la evidencia mas profunda de la justicia, de la misericordia. En seto vemos la bendicion mas grande de Dios.⁶ (*Crossing* 293).

The key words here are, "es que ultimamente todo es polvo. Todo lo que podemos tocar. Todo lo que podemos ver," which says that all that can be seen and touched will turn to dust. What is then left would be those things that cannot be touched but felt nonetheless. In Billy's circumstance, it is his spirit, the fire that he possesses throughout the novel. The dichotomy created by an act of violence actually bringing about a good change in the blind man's life is mirrored in Billy's journey and becomes clearer as the trilogy continues and Billy survives to find a family.

As the thread of contradiction persists throughout the majority of the novel, the church caretaker Billy meets is the closest Billy gets to receiving spiritual guidance on his journey, and the most important advice that Billy receives from the caretaker comes in "the corridor" or the tale about the heretic. In the tale, the caretaker states that "everything is necessary. Every least thing. This is the hard lesson. Nothing can be dispensed with. Nothing despised. Because the seams are hid from us, you see. The joinery. The way in which the world is made. We have no

⁶ We are mourners in the darkness. All of us. Do you understand me? Those who can see, and those who cannot...What we should understand, is that finally everything is dust. All we can touch. All we can see. In this we have evidence more profound than justice, than mercy. In this we see the greatest blessing of God.

way to tell what could be taken away. What omitted” (*Crossing* 143). Edwin T. Arnold believes that the caretaker’s words come to fruition at the end of the novel. Arnold posits the notion that with all the heartache Billy has experienced that he has a revelation during the last scene of the novel that proves Billy is forever changed from a naïve boy to a hardened man. Arnold calls this revelation an “instant of fear, confusion, and abasement” for Billy and that “the naïve, magical joy of his first vision of the dancing wolves is forever replaced by a darker, more profound understanding of human vanity, an arrogance so great that it threatens the fundamental pattern established by the creative god, a destruction in which that god itself now seems willing to ‘conspire’” (63). Arnold recognizes Billy’s change after burying his brother, his last relative, and as he experiences a moment of despair when he lashes out at the dog. True enough, his actions are in stark contrast to his previous treatment of the mystical wolves and the shewolf, but what should be noted is what exactly the dog represents.

When the sadly misshapen dog is viewed in juxtaposition to the mystical shewolf, it becomes clearer what the dog may represent. A dog is a domesticated descendent of a wolf, and the fact that this dog is so wounded suggests that perhaps the dog is a representation of man’s effect on nature. Arnold emphasizes the use of the word *three* in relation to the dog when it “turned three times and lay down,” and Billy’s use of the “threefoot length waterpipe” used in order to chase away the dog. According to Arnold, “this dog, a three-legged monstrosity that encapsulates so many images of trinity in the novel serves as Billy’s double, as emblem of all outcasts and aliens denied the common bond” (62). However, the end of the trilogy does not support this reading of Billy as outcast; Billy does indeed find a family in *Cities of the Plains*. Similar to Arnold’s notion that the dog somehow represents Billy, Kevin Cole in his analysis of *The Crossing* highlights the fact that the novel is framed with the many uses of “dogs”: “The

story opens and closes with the account of the protagonist's interaction with a pregnant wolf and an arthritic dog”(112). While Cole’s assessment of the opening of the novel is not entirely accurate, dogs do play a crucial role in the novel. Cole’s conclusions about the purpose of the dog turn to Billy’s breaking point at the end of the novel. Cole suggests that the ambiguous scene when “Billy cries is perhaps because of his treatment of the dog, or perhaps because he recognizes their mutual suffering. Whatever the case, *The Crossing* opens with Billy's gesture of compassion toward the wolf and closes with a gesture of nihilism toward the old dog, a gesture that later causes regret. In the end, Billy resembles both the wolf and the old dog” (114). While the representative nature of the dog can be interpreted in several ways, the inclination that the dog represents the natural world fits well with the direction of the story. This is not to say that the dog does not represent Billy because, like the natural world, Billy, too, has been broken by man, broken by the deaths of those he loved. Perhaps the dog is meant to represent both Billy and the world, thus creating yet another dichotomy to move McCarthy’s story to a fitting close.

Nevertheless, Billy, with his unwavering spirit of goodness, does come back to his senses the next morning, and most importantly, after what is suggested to be an atomic bomb test, he calls to the dog. This is the moment that he realizes “everything is necessary. Every least thing” (*Crossing* 143). According to Robert Jarrett, “the absurdity of Billy Parham’s attempt to deal with the loss of his father by recovering his horses reveals to him the innocence and inadequacy of his own code” (102). Yet, Billy’s actions throughout the novel show Billy trying to rectify many wrongs and to recover many losses. While it is true that Billy does possess a great deal of innocence and naivety where the world is concerned, he is far from inadequate. The novel ends with Billy weeping, and while his state of mind is never made clear, his weeping suggests that the lesson that Billy learns in the end is perhaps the lesson that the text intends for all to

learn, that inside there are incongruent figures that come together to create each individual, and it is with those figures that one sees the possibilities of human nature. There is hope in the final words of the novel that contradict the implications of the atomic bomb's use: "after a while the east did gray and after a while the right and godmade sun did rise, once again, for all and without distinction" (*Crossing* 426). The use of an atomic bomb would suggest a bleak future for both Billy and the world, yet the sun does rise again and for all without any exceptions.

SECTION 2: “MR PARHAM, I KNOW WHO YOU ARE:” BILLY’S HOMECOMING

Cities of the Plain, the final volume of Cormac McCarthy’s border trilogy, brings together the separate tales of John Grady Cole from *All the Pretty Horses* (1992) and Billy Parham from *The Crossing* (1994) to create a heroic tale of love, loss, and hope for the future as it draws McCarthy’s border trilogy to a fitting close. As the novel opens, Billy has finally ceased his wandering and settled down, content to live life as a ranch-hand. Though it does seem as if he has finally found happiness in his life, he is once again tested as he earnestly tries to look after John Grady, his newly acquired surrogate brother. Billy’s unwavering devotion to John Grady and his chosen way of life truly reflects the “largeness of spirit” he developed on his journey in *The Crossing*.

John Grady and Billy have both become true cowboys of their time.¹ They both live off the land and express supreme happiness in their lifestyle. Yet, Billy is the most vocal about his love for his way of life: “Daybreak to backbreak for a godgiven dollar, said Billy. I love this life. You love this life, son? I love this life. You do love this life dont you? Cause by god I love it Just love it” (*Cities* 10). He thrives in his chosen way of life and seems to encompass what the “cowboy” lifestyle is all about. While resting in the grass during lunch, Billy spots a coyote in the distance. Immediately, John Grady goes for his rifle, yet Billy, with his strongly established connection to nature, just appreciates the animal. He shows great admiration for the animal, telling John Grady, “He’ll be gone before you get done standing up” (*Cities* 11). John Grady goes on to question the animal’s presence: “What you reckon he’s doin out here in the middle of the day?” (*Cities* 12). John Grady at this moment seems disconnected from the land in a way that Billy never does. Billy responds in a most simple yet enlightened way: “He probably wonders the same about you” (*Cities* 12). Billy’s answer to John Grady shows that he has not lost any of

the insight that he gained with his relationship with the mystical she-wolf in *The Crossing*.

Though Billy's intention of removing the she-wolf and returning her to her native land was born out of his wish to help her, his exertion of control over her can be viewed as a representation of the control that man is determined to have over the natural world. According to Sanborn, in *The Crossing*, "man and the wolf [could] not coexist, so one species [was] eradicated while the other species propagates and thrives. Man's intolerance for the wolf leaves little room for man's honor, and both man and the wolves suffer because of the dishonor involved in the eradication efforts" (148). When Billy responds to John Grady's efforts to eradicate the coyote, he displays a reverence for the land and a respect for the coyote; Billy now knows that they are the encroachers and that the land truly belongs to the animals that live there. While clearly both are "cowboys," John Grady and Billy view the world very differently. Billy shows a great deal of spiritual growth concerning the natural world and sees honor in preserving nature, while John Grady clearly does not understand the presence of the coyote and its right to be on the range with them.

Early in the text, it becomes clear that Billy, being the older of the two, is the one full of wisdom and insight. His demeanor when he asks about John Grady's whereabouts, jokingly referring to him as "the all-american cowboy," shows that Billy is the parental figure within their relationship. Contrasting Billy's description and treatment of John Grady with the fact that they are in a brothel, with John Grady as the first through the door, paints a clear picture of John Grady's ill-fated future with whores. Clearly the romantic cowboy of the pair, John Grady works with the most difficult of horses and foils a dishonest horse-dealer with the same quiet willful naivety that he embodies in his love for the Magdalena. He finds her at the White Lake, an expensive and menacing brothel run by pimp Eduardo. John Grady spends many evenings with

Magdalena, who despite her position as a prostitute seems to fall in love with him in return. Ignoring the obvious obstacles to their love affair, John Grady is determined to have her as his. Billy's declaration to John Grady that he reminds Billy of Boyd helps solidify John Grady's fate: "More and more you remind me of Boyd. Only way I could ever get him to do anything was to tell him not to" (*Cities* 146). The connection of John Grady to Boyd is reminiscent of how Boyd sees two images of himself in the eyes of the Indian, and this twinned image of Boyd persists throughout *The Crossing*. Throughout the previous text, Boyd is the younger brother whom Billy always tries to protect and shelter, and now it is John Grady who Billy is trying to protect. John Grady is not the only one in this moment who mirrors Boyd. Billy's tendency to internalize the characteristics of the people he interacts with is a crucial part of who he is as a person. When he and Boyd were children, Billy was the naïve leader of the pair, while Boyd was the pragmatic follower. However pragmatic he may seem now as he discourages John Grady, Billy, being the dichotomy that he is, never truly relinquishes his own naivety, which is clear as his support for John Grady never wavers and he supports and follows him.

Needless to say, John Grady eventually shares the same fate as Billy's baby brother, Boyd. According to Jay Ellis, "John Grady and Billy Parham become the most heroic of McCarthy characters, even as the two younger charges of Billy cannot be saved by him. Indeed, in the web of failed rescues that creates the plots of *The Border Trilogy*, we may say that heroic failure weaves the central thread: John Grady cannot save Jimmy Blevins or Magdalena any more than can Billy Parham save the wolf, his brother Boyd, or in the end John Grady" (268). The connection between John Grady and Billy shape the majority of the story in *Cities of the Plain*, and their separation is a heart-wrenchingly decisive moment for Billy.

John Grady constructs a plan to take Magdalena from the brothel, but his plan goes awry

and ends with him finding her at the morgue with her throat slit. He confronts Eduardo and is fatally wounded. When Billy finds John Grady, it is clear that John Grady is not going to survive, but Billy is continually positive throughout his last moments with John Grady: “We’ll get you back. Dont quit on me now, goddamn it” (*Cities* 258). Billy repeatedly tells John Grady that he is going to live and does not entertain the notion that he is going to die. After Billy returns with water for John Grady, he discovers that he has finally died: “Here you go, bud, he said. But he had already seen. He set the waterglasses slowly down. Bud, he said. Bud?” (*Cities* 261). Billy calls softly to John Grady, as if to refuse the truth that he sees with his own eyes. However, the truth does eventually dawn on Billy, and he realizes that he has lost yet another brother:

Aint that pitful, he said. Aint that the most goddamn pitiful thing? Aint it? Oh God. Bud. Oh goddamn. When he had him gathered in his arms he rose and turned. Goddamn whores, he said. He was crying and the tears ran on his angry face and he called out to the broken day against them all and he called out to God to see what was before his eyes. Look at this, he called. Do you see? Do you see? (*Cities* 261).

In this moment, Billy is just as broken as he was at the end of his journey in *The Crossing*. The pivotal difference with this moment of despair is that Billy targets women and God with his rage. Ellis views this moment in Billy’s story as the pinnacle of the trilogy’s preoccupation with orphanage: “The preoccupation with orphanage that is expressed at its highest pitch in *The Border Trilogy*’s ending is heightened already in several passages in *Cities of the Plain*. The adopted puppies of exploded mother dogs sets up, but in ironic opposition, the blame Billy [heaps] on mothers and would-be wives...” (273). The fact that Billy seems to blame women for the death of his adopted brother hints at a reproach against women and domesticity. Nell Sullivan views Billy’s rant as a “[witness to] the systematic expulsion of women” in the *Border Trilogy*

(229). Sullivan ultimately views the entire trilogy as an “expulsion of containment of women;” she states: “each novel in the trilogy ultimately excludes the potentially significant female characters as part of the process of the obviation of women” (229). While Sullivan’s assertion holds some merit and women are not very prevalent in the trilogy, many women gravitate towards Billy and care for him in some manner.

In *The Crossing*, after killing the she-wolf and Billy is wandering in the mountains, it is a woman in the mining town, El Tigre, who feed and cares for him. Her sleeping sister, who seems more mystical than human, emerges to touch and bless Billy, as if she is drawn from her slumber: “The sleeping sister pulled her wrap about herself and reached and touched the boy’s face with one hand. Then she turned and passed back through the doorway to be seen no more” (*Crossing* 132). After this encounter, Billy continues on his journey deeper into the mountains; he is welcomed by various Indian tribes, but it is the women who care for him in a nurturing capacity: “They fed him and the women wash his clothes” (*Crossing* 133). The type of man Billy truly is shows when he saves the girl from would-be rapists. Though the girl is not overly receptive of the many offers from Billy to ride his horse, she is not afraid of him and eventually lets him carry her bundle. After they part ways on the road and she is taken, Billy and Boyd return to save her. Billy is the driving force behind this rescue; Boyd repeatedly tells Billy how crazy he is to be concerned with the girl, but Billy is adamant about his intentions. Once she is rescued, the girl, like the women before her, displays a very nurturing attitude towards Billy. He wakes to her cooking and preparing a meal. While Boyd sits by the fire drinking from his cup, “...she brought [Billy] a cup of hot chocolate” (*Crossing* 213). They soon come upon a hacienda and Billy is once again met with a nurturing woman: “She saw Billy still sitting on the ground and she motioned him up. Vamonos, she called” (*Crossing* 218). Just as the women in the

mountains, the Munoz women feed Billy, mend his boot and even gift him with coins when he departs. This is a behavior that is repeated again and again by the women Billy encounters in both *The Crossing* and *Cities on the Plain* and says much about the largeness of Billy's spirit. It is in New Mexico that Billy finally finds a home. He is eventually taken in by a family and given a room much like the one he had as a young boy. The final pages of the trilogy truly highlight the largeness of Billy's spirit; while he is technically alone during his travels, the people he seeks out and the people who seek him say much about the man whom Billy has become: "He stopped to talk to children or to horses. Women fed him in their kitchens" (*Cities* 290). Even as an old man, Billy is the same Billy that began his journey years ago in *The Crossing*. Billy is still drawn to innocence and to nature as he seeks to speak with children and horses, and just as many people aided him on his many trips across the border, it is still women who recognize the innocence and goodness of Billy's spirit and continue to always seem to be drawn to Billy with some desire to nurture and care for him.

What truly emerges in the scene of John Grady's death is the duality of Billy's spirit as he carries his fallen friend through the streets, not a hatred or rejection of women:

The dead boy in his arms hung with his head back and those partly opened eyes beheld nothing at all out of that passing landscape of street or wall or paling sky or the figures of the children who stood blessing themselves in the gray light. This man and his burden passed on forever out of that nameless crossroads and the women stepped once more into the street and the children followed and all continued on to their appointed places which as some believe were chosen long ago even to the beginning of the world (*Cities* 261-62).

True enough, Billy is broken by his friend's death, but not completely. He continues to move forward, carrying his dead "brother" into the next phase of life. According to Ellis, "we see

through their eyes the quickly aging Billy in a walking pieta”² (273). His classification of Billy as a pieta places Billy in a feminine role, the mother, yet Billy also emerges as both orphan boy and heartbroken father in this scene as he cradles John Grady’s body. Ellis notes that with the death of Billy’s own father he was reborn but only partly: “Billy at the death of his father, is only partly reborn as a father figure to Boyd—at which he fails” (279). Once again Billy has failed as a father figure; he blames himself for John Grady’s death, as well as the women he curses, telling Mr. Mac, “I should of looked after him better” (*Cities* 263). Ellis highlights the fact that the trilogy does not end with John Grady’s death and Billy’s rant against women and God, but it goes on to “[follow] the once again orphaned Billy, the failed father, through a landscape so devoid of quotidian and domestic values that it becomes a waking dream” (273). He refers to the next years of Billy’s life the “country of disillusioned men still looking for their parents” (273). Although, Billy does not find his surrogate family for quite some time, which signals that Billy’s journey is not yet complete.

The Epilogue begins with Billy’s departure from the ranch in the wake of John Grady’s death, and then fast forwards many years until he is an old man, seventy-eight years old, sleeping under an overpass, and once again wandering. Similar to his travels in *The Crossing*, he again meets a stranger during his travels who shares a story and some wisdom with him. After sharing crackers with the stranger, he listens to the stranger’s story, which is both long, confusing, and oddly indicative of Billy’s own story. The stranger speaks of a dream within a dream and of a man on a journey. Many times during his story, Billy interrupts requesting clarification, and in certain moments, appears frustrated: “I think you got a habit of makin things a bit more complicated than what they need to be. Why not just tell the story?” (*Cities* 279). For Ellis this “last comment may even be read as McCarthy’s guilty admission that his interest in complexity

theory, and other means of furthering the tropes and twists of his philosophy through the last several books, indeed might impede the power of his storytelling” (308). While this may very well may be the case, it would be more useful to view this statement as Billy’s admission of guilt. Perhaps it is Billy who is frustrated with the difficulties of life; given the fact that he has spent his entire life wandering and caring for others only to fail, maybe it is Billy who finally realizes that his tendency to protect others has complicated his life and led him to where he is in this moment. Billy experiences guilt many times during his life; he is deeply troubled after the death of the she-wolf, which is why he secludes himself in the mountains; he is broken after returning to find his parents dead, which is why he tries to recover his father’s horses; he feels guilt for not being able to save both Boyd and John Grady, which is why he recovers Boyd’s bones and leaves the ranch he worked with John Grady. His guilt following John Grady’s death is evident with his parting words to Mac: “I should of looked after him better” (*Cities* 263).

While Billy may indeed recognize that he may be the one at fault for the many difficulties that he has faced in his life, he does know that one must go on and not give up. Billy repeats this sentiment to the stranger throughout the stranger’s story; he first begins speaking in the stranger’s native language, but as he get more frustrated with the convoluted story, he switches to his own language: “Andale,” or “Go ahead,” or “Carry on,” etc.”(*Cities* 274-282). Billy’s frustration is for himself as much as it is for the stranger. His last words to the stranger are to tell him that he must move on: “I got to get on” (*Cities* 288). Given how much the stranger’s tale eerily mirror’s Billy’s journey’s throughout his life, it would seem that Billy’s frustration is a result of the many complexities that have slowed his own story. McCarthy does not leave Billy alone and broken under the overpass; Billy moves on once again, sleeping here and there, making his way to New Mexico.

The final scene of the trilogy is an interaction between Billy and Betty, the woman who has taken him in and given him a home. Billy has a troubling dream about Boyd, and when Billy wakes, he sees that Betty has come to check on him. He tells her about Boyd and how he longs to see him once more: "I always liked to watch him ride. Liked to watch him around horses. I'd give about anything to see him one more time" (*Cities* 291). She assures him that he will again one day. As she rises to leave, "She patted his hand. Gnarled, ropescarred, speckled from the sun and the years of it. The ropy veins that bound them to his heart. There was map enough for men to read. The God's plenty of signs and wonders to make a landscape. To make a world" (*Cities* 291). His hands are a map of his life, and similar to the stranger under the overpass who spoke of mapping his own life in order "to know better how to continue," Billy's journey through life is mapped in scars that lead directly to his heart, directly to the man he has become. Billy stops Betty as she tries to leave and tells her, "I'm not what you think I am. I aint nothin. I dont know why you put up with me" (*Cities* 292). Billy does not believe that he is anyone special, which goes back once again to the words of the stranger under the overpass who told Billy, "I'm guessing everyman is more than he supposes," and that is exactly what Betty assures Billy of: "Well, Mr Parham, I know who you are. And I do know why. You go to sleep now. I'll see you in the morning" (*Cities* 271, 292). While Billy cannot see the man he has become, Betty and many others can, which is precisely why so many people were drawn to Billy over the years. They were drawn to his largeness of spirit, the greatness in him that was first developed those many years ago when he crept from his bed as a boy to see the wolves dance in the snow. Billy answers Betty with very child-like words, "Yes mam," which are the last words spoken by Billy in the trilogy (*Cities* 292). In this final moment, he is the man-child that emerged in *The Crossing*; with his last words, he embodies the innocence that he never truly lost throughout his

pain-filled life.

The final page of the trilogy consist of a dedication, and it is with this poem that the dichotomy of Billy comes full circle:

I will be your child to hold

And you be me when I am old

The world grows cold

The heathen rage

The story's told

Turn the page (*Cities* 293).

In Billy's final moments, he is both man and child—the orphan and the failed father, and yet, he finds someone to care for him as a child would care for a parent in old age. However, Ellis sees this poem as a direct address from McCarthy: “This poem’s voice arrives entirely outside narration, and it cannot be Billy, Betty, or the stranger. Indeed, the word ‘Dedication’ clearly suggests this is the author, Cormac McCarthy, in his most direct address” (310). While this assessment of the poem may very well be correct, the duality encompassed in the first two lines mirrors Billy’s role throughout both *The Crossing* and *Cities of the Plain*. Many times throughout Billy’s life he has embodied both orphaned child and parental figure, and it is with Betty that he finally gains the person he needs to care for him in his final years. Given that Billy is an elderly man when he is taken in by Betty, she too emerges as a dichotomy; she is both a parental figure, the mother Billy has so long needed, and she is the child who cares for the aging parent. Ellis addresses the complexities of the poem by noting how the speaker moves to an imperative, demanding point of view, much like a child: “The second line achieves remarkable complexity for such simple language: now the speaker moves to an imperative, a demand as a

child might make it: ‘you be me.’ But the line ends wisely, ‘when I am old.’ Only a child whose maturity has reached that moment when his or her parent reverts back to a child-like state of dependence can anticipate this reversal; the parent of the parent, now become as a child” (*Cities* 310). The convoluted nature of the lines of the poem help lend to the thematic emergence of duality that weaves its way through Billy’s nature and the end of his story.

The circumstance of Billy surviving the border trilogy and finding a family suggests that McCarthy champions Billy’s unwavering innocence, which is something that also happens in *The Road* when the boy, too, finds a family, particularly a mother. Ellis views Billy as representative of all McCarthy orphans: “*The Crossing’s* evenly serious tone then deepens the biblical sense of an end of days falling over the last three novels. McCarthy’s typology begins to show through more and more, as Billy becomes the representative echo of every McCarthy orphan” (291). With that being said, perhaps it is innocence that McCarthy champions. While the fire spoken of in *The Road* is never truly defined, it is read to be a type of innocence, a type of authentic goodness that the father sees in his boy. This is what is immediately recognized by the woman at the end of *The Road*: “The woman when she saw him put her arms around him and held him. Oh, she said, I am so glad to see you” (*The Road* 286). Both Betty and the woman seek to nurture Billy and the boy; they recognize the goodness in both of them and are drawn to that goodness. The fact that the boy and Billy both survive their stories and find mothers in the end suggests that perhaps McCarthy’s world, no matter how dark and violent, still contains small glimmers of hope, which is inevitably found in the goodness of the spirit.

CONCLUSION

Billy's goodness is a direct result of the many experiences that he has had during his life, yet the most remarkable development about Billy is that his spirit becomes infused with the dichotomies that he is faced with on his journeys—thus, he becomes a dual soul. Billy's dual spirit is first recognized in the languages he uses, both English and Spanish, to communicate with his brother and the people he meets; this dual spirit is primarily fostered and nurtured by nature, particularly his connection to the natural world, which McCarthy creates using the mystical wolves. Billy's first encounter with wolves help to solidify his connection to nature; the moment in which Billy and the wolves held each's sight was an electric moment that changed Billy's spirit forever. This connection is later strengthened by his relationship with the mystical she-wolf. The dichotomy that is threaded throughout Billy's story begins with the she-wolf; she being pregnant and a predator comes to represent the conflicting existence of life and death occurring simultaneously within the natural world. As his journey progresses, the people in his life and the people he encounters on his journey also aid in the development of his dual spirit.

Boyd, his younger brother, and later John Grady both aid Billy in the creation of his spirit. Boyd, with his untrusting visceral view of the world, lends Billy a practical way to see the people he encounters. Boyd's impact on Billy's nature is not truly known until Billy meets John Grady; the relationship between John Grady and Billy is much like the one between Boyd and Billy. Yet, this does not mean that Billy has totally abandoned his own naivety. The beauty of Billy's spirit is that he can never truly rid himself of the naïve goodness that guides him. In addition to Boyd and John Grady, Billy meets many strangers during his life who also play a significant part in the development of his spirit, one of whom was the old man in the mountains who helped Billy realize that he should return to civilization. Their stories have significant

impact on the man that Billy will become.

As much as the people in Billy's life aid in shaping the man he is to become, the loss of those people play a key part also. Three times during Billy's journey from boy to man, he experiences losses that are devastatingly painful and threaten to change who he is becoming. The first loss is that of the she-wolf, after which he becomes reclusive and wanders alone in the mountains. He is encouraged to return to his life because people would long to a part of his life. The next two losses are Boyd and John Grady; they both were significant parts of Billy's life, and both their losses threaten to completely destroy Billy, but Billy never gives in to the despair that he feels. He consistently pushes forward in life.

Billy's conclusion is one full of hope. He is orphaned when his parents die, and he is continually orphaned throughout the trilogy as he loses those closest to him. Yet, his story ends with him in a home with a family, most particularly a mother. Betty emerges as the mother and parental figure whom Billy has been without for so long. Her confidence in Billy's spirit is what suggests that Billy's goodness is something that emanates from him, drawing others to him like a beckon of hope in a world of despair. His ending confirms what the old man in the mountains told him so long ago—that "he contained within him a largeness of spirit which men could see and men would wish to know him even as he needed the world for they were one" (*Cities of the Plains* 134). Though many people were drawn to him throughout his life, Betty's presence at the end of the trilogy solidifies both Billy's and the world's need for the goodness in his spirit.

Indeed McCarthy's stories are full of violence and severely bleak situations, but the key to understanding his intended message is to look past all the violence and find the goodness and hope that is always there beneath the surface. The natural world that McCarthy writes of is one

of incongruent elements: darkness and light, ugliness and beauty, and life and death—all simultaneously existing in one plane, and while some may see this as a solely nihilistic world full of absurdity and chaos, that is not the case. The overall message found within the texts and stories of Cormac McCarthy is that no matter how much evil a person is faced with, goodness should remain the guiding force in life. Evil should never be allowed to take root in the soul and push out the goodness, and in order to do this, man must learn to embrace the dichotomies that create the world—darkness and light, ugliness and beauty, and life and death—which is precisely what Billy manages to do during his life. Billy would not be the same man without the dichotomies that he internalized within his spirit, just as the natural world would cease to be if there were no longer dichotomies that exist to form it. This is not to say that Billy has achieved some sort of perfection; it is the exact opposite. He is still flawed and still human; his achievement rests in how he manages to embrace the differentiating forces that drive the natural world, making them a part of his spirit, and in doing so, creating a dual soul led by grace and goodness.

NOTES

1.) According to Barclay Owens, McCarthy's cowboys are "likable, good-natured young men who set off on quests for adventure, in the mode of Huck Finn. Unlike the kid of *Blood Meridian*, the protagonists of the Border Trilogy are fully developed, three-dimensional characters assuming mythic roles in familiar narratives" (63).

2.) Largely a theme used in Christian art, it is a depiction of the Virgin Mary supporting the body of the dead Christ. Some representations of the *Pietà* include John the Apostle, Mary Magdalene, and sometimes other figures on either side of the Virgin but commonly show only Mary and her Son. The *Pietà* was widely represented in both painting and sculpture, being one of the most poignant visual expressions of popular concern with the emotional aspects of the lives of Christ and the Virgin (Ellis).

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